THE VOICE OF THE VALLEY

The Newsletter of the Lehigh Valley Gay and Lesbian Task Force / Vol. 2, Issue 2

JUNE 1995

INSIDE

PRIDE FESTIVAL

Pride of the Lehigh Valley will present its second annual Pride Festival, and this year's event promises to be even bigger and better than last year's success. For details, see page 2.

NEW TO BOARD

Members of the Task Force have elected a new treasurer and six members of the board of directors. For details, see page 3.

COLONEL SPEAKS

Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer speaks at Northampton Community College. For details, see page 4.

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by Frank Baran

Survey to examine anti-gay bias here

By **RENAE BENNETT**
Discrimination Committee Co-Chair

Welcome to the kickoff of the first survey of discrimination against gays and lesbians in the Lehigh Valley.

The survey has been through at least as many facelifts as Dick Clark. But we are proud of the final product.

By filling out our first survey, you are making history. In the past we have been asked to participate in other surveys, but this is the first time an instrument has been designed specifically to describe the situation for gays, lesbians and bisexuals and transgenders in the Lehigh Valley.

It may seem redundant for us to collect data about our community. We know we are here. How could others in the Lehigh Valley not know? But as recently as late May, a region-wide funding organization for AIDS education in the Valley reported that - according to their needs assessment survey - out of five thousand respondents, only 175 identified themselves as gay or lesbian. As a result of this unfortunate underrepresentation, there were no funds allocated for AIDS education for the gay population. Their demographics fly in the face of what we know to be the size of our community. But until now we have not been able to document our numbers.

Just as important as educating our community is protecting us from violence and discrimination in employment, housing and health care. But for officers of the Task Force to approach city and township officials with concerns about the way we are treated is meaningless, unless we can document incidents of discrimination with numbers.

*(See **SURVEY** on page 2)*

Don't let silence, disunity be our undoing

Editor's Note: The author presented these remarks at the keynote address for the Task Force's annual meeting on May 31.

By **CHRIS ACKNER**
Vice President

Much as I hesitate to give credit to the conservative right, I must admit that I am learning, and believe we have much to learn, from Newt Gingrich and his "Contract with America." Whatever I might think of his agenda to give the devil his due - he is making changes. And that's what the lesbian and gay community needs to do.

Admitting the the Republican Party was in disarray following the loss of the presidential election, leaders of the party stepped back, regrouped and prioritized. We have witnessed their success in the Republican sweep of the Senate and the House just two years after a bitter defeat on the presidential level.

Conversely, riding high on the euphoria of a presidential coup, and complacent beyond measure, Democrats have learned a bitter lesson, finding themselves fighting - not to advance the liberal agenda - but merely to protect what has been accomplished in the past.

When we look to our own community, we can see the same scenario - albeit we are not fighting for seats in the House but for our very lives. Fooling ourselves into believing that marching a million strong in Washington, and lulled by rhetoric that persuaded us that we were part of the America of the Nineties, we have gone back to our homes and let the

Many of us were naive enough to believe marching on Washington would substitute for the hard work it takes to make changes in society.

*(See **SILENCE** on page 5)*

Pride Festival is bigger, better than last year's

By **TERRY RICHLINE**

The second annual Lehigh Valley Pride Festival will take place on Sunday, June 11, from noon to 6 p.m. at Cedar Beach Park in Allentown. The Festival is sponsored by Pride of the Lehigh Valley: Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals Together Inc.

This year's festival is going to be exciting, with more merchandise vendors, more food vendors and more entertainment than last year. Scheduled to perform at noon sharp is the openly gay, footstompin' country band, Doug Stevens and The Outband.

Headlining the festival is comic, singer, songwriter lesbian Lynn Lavner. Lynn performed in 40 states and five foreign countries (six if you count Provincetown).

Also performing is singer-songwriter Keith Christopher. And returning from last year is that outrageous feminist lesbian trio, Destiny. Two local groups, the Lehigh Valley Gay Mens Chorus and ACCO, A Chorus Celebrating Women, will be showcased, along with local performers Sharon Eddinger and Friends.

But there is more going on in the Lehigh Valley than the Pride Festival!

Pride Film Fest: Wednesday, June 7, at 7:30 p.m in Whitaker Lab, Lehigh University. An exciting lineup of six lesbian and gay films. These films have never been seen in the Lehigh Valley. Don't miss this!

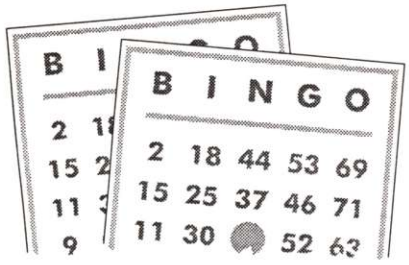
Your Turf Dance Party: Friday, June 9, from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Dance the night away! Just for LesBiGay youth under 21.

Ecumenical Worship Service: Saturday, June 10, at 7:30 p.m. at Hope United Church of Christ, 1031 Flexer Ave., Allentown. A special worship service is planned by area churches. The Rev. Emily Jean Gilbert will be the preacher, with special music provided by the Lehigh Valley Gay Men's Chorus. A social time will follow the service. Sponsors include the Metropolitan Community Church of the Lehigh Valley, Integrity of Bethlehem and Grace Covenant Church.

Lehigh Valley Pride Festival: Sunday, June 11, noon to 6 p.m. at Cedar Beach Park, Hamilton Street, Allentown. This event is held rain or shine.

Pride Dance Party: Sunday, June 11, 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. at the Stonewall/Moose Lounge, Allentown. Features a special performance by the Stonewall Enigma Players.

For information on the festival or any Pride Week event, call (610) 770-6200.



The Task Force's monthly BINGO games will return in the fall. Watch for the date in the next issue of the newsletter.

SURVEY

(Continued from p. 1)

We hope that this survey will begin the process of systematically documenting the problems gays and lesbians experience in the Lehigh Valley, and that identifying problem areas will be the first step in combating that discrimination.

In addition to the survey, you will receive discrimination incident reports designed to record in more detail the nature of the discrimination you may encounter here in the Valley. We encourage you to take a copy of each incident report, and fill them out whenever you experience any kind of discrimination or unfair treatment because of sexual orientation - or the perception of a different sexual orientation. As with the survey, we implore you to answer honestly, recording only those incidents which involve sexual orientation.

Once again I want to assure you that your answers will be completely confidential. At no time will any individual's answers to the survey be connected with any name. The incident reports will be handled separately from the survey, and names on those reports will not be for public knowledge. We invite you to take additional copies of the survey only if you are sure that someone will fill them out. We are setting up dropoff points throughout the Valley to make it easier for people to return filled-out surveys. But if you can consider the price of a 32-cent stamp a worthwhile contribution to the Task Force, we would appreciate your mailing the survey back to us.

For a copy of an incident report form, please call the Task Force Hot Line at (610) 515-1551.

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Task Force elects a new treasurer, six board members

The Lehigh Valley Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Board of Directors is back up to full strength as a result of elections conducted at the annual membership meeting on May 31.

The treasurership and six board seats were to be filled at this election, the second since the Task Force progressed from an informal body to an incorporated organization one year ago.

However, informality reigned at this year's event. The idea was to enable existing members and newcomers to network and learn about the important roles other gay and lesbian organizations play in advancing the community's interests.

Although the members in attendance agreed at the outset to waive the requirement for a quorum, a few late arrivals who signed up for memberships on the spot pushed participation to 46, enough to transact official business without a waiver.

President Manny Gonzalez opened the meeting by summarizing the Task Force's accomplishments and activities now underway. Manny outlined the efforts to examine the extent and nature of anti-gay discrimination in the Valley so that the Task Force can prove to legislators and local officials that problems in employment, housing and violence do exist and need to be addressed.

In the keynote address, Vice President Chris Ackner called on all gay, lesbian, bi and transgendered people in the Valley to cooperate to protect the community's interests against a well-financed and aggressive Radical Right agenda. (Her remarks appear in full elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Treasurer Steve Black's annual financial report showed the Task Force took in $6,112.47 last year and spent $3,234.67, leaving cash on hand of $4,522.63.

The only executive position on the ballot this time was treasurer.

Wendy Walker, a school teacher, was chosen over Steve, an attorney. The vote was 40 to 5.

In her presentation, Wendy unfurled a banner that proclaimed her candidacy as "ROAR" - responsible, organization-ally-minded, accurate and reliable.

Board of Directors

An asterisk (*) designates members elected May 31.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: Manny Gonzalez
Vice President: Chris Ackner
Clerk: David Charrier
Treasurer: Wendy Walker*

BOARD MEMBERS

Renae Bennett
Steve Black*
Tom Cunningham*
Liz Fox
Brett Miller*
Kathy Smith*
Remo Stipa*
Peach Trigliani*

Wendy said she decided to relinquish the presidency of her women's softball league so she could devote more time to the Task Force. She said her experience as treasurer for Grace Covenant Church will enable her to serve the Task Force well as treasurer. She said fighting discrimination must be a priority for the Task Force.

Steve, a Task Force member since the inception, said he kept membership and mailing lists up to date, wrote the incident report forms that will be used to track anti-gay discrimination and is working on a referral list of gay-friendly attorneys and therapists. Steve said his involvement in the League of Gay and Lesbian Voters gives the Task Force a statewide perspective on hate crimes bills and other legislation. Steve also prepares the League's 13-county Voters Guide.

In a separate election, Steve was one of six board members elected by acclamation that night. Also elected to the board were Brett Miller, Kathy Smith, Consella "Peach" Trigliana, Remo Stipa and Tom Cunningham. Under the bylaws, the Task Force's board must reflect gender parity. The board now consists of six men and six women.

In between rounds of voting, representatives of other gay and lesbian organizations went to the podium to explain their projects and invite participation. In addition, the organizations were offered tables at the back of the meeting hall to distribute brochures and sell raffle tickets and products.

Among the groups participating were Pride of the Lehigh Valley; Pride in Motion, a 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous group; Lehigh Valley Lesbians; Grace Covenant Fellowship; the Rainbow Group, an Alcoholics Anonymous organization; and the League of Gay and Lesbian Voters.

The final presentation was by Renae Bennett, co-chair of the Task Force's Discrimination Committee. Renae introduced the new discrimination survey, which will be circulated widely in coming weeks.

Coming June 22!

Join us at Diamonz for a Task Force Benefit!

PRESENTING ...

Diamonz Al and the Lehigh Valley Girls

A DRAG REVUE LIKE NO OTHER!

Thursday, June 22 ▼ Doors open at 9 p.m.; show at 10 p.m.

Proceeds go to Task Force anti-discrimination projects

SILENT NO LONGER

Col. Cammermeyer discusses prejudice and her struggle for justice

By **VINCE THOMPSON, M.D.**

Serving in Silence is the issue some 500 persons awaited to hear voiced on Wednesday, April 12, at the Northampton Community College Theatre. The audience listened with anticipation to the words of Professor Chris Ackner as she formally welcomed all to this special presentation of Col. Margarethe Cammermeyer, Vietnam nurse, mother of four, highest ranking officer to challenge the military's anti-gay policy, and author of Serving in Silence.

The colonel was introduced by J. Renae Bennett, a former staff sergeant in the U.S. Air Force. Bennett told of her own separation from the military in 1991 because of her sexual orientation. She told of her own recent return to Arizona; the fort at which she once served; the life for which she still mourned; and the grief still carried for what was lost. Bennett spoke of the true injustice of the military's separation policy - an issue no longer nameless, an issue no longer faceless, a very human issue. With that, Bennett, holding back tears, introduced Col. Cammermeyer, as the crowd rose to its feet in ovation.

The colonel, born in Oslo, Norway, during the Nazi occupation, set the evening's tone with an accounting man's prejudice, discrimination and hate of his fellow man. She spoke of the Japanese internment camps of World War II, the discrimination of blacks, and the blackballing and persecutions of McCarthy. She spoke of the world of "Marilyn and Rock," the glorification of romance, and the perfect family: mom, dad, two kids, a station wagon, and, occasionally, Lassie.

The colonel then told her story, of her early days, swaddled in her stroller with guns that her mother smuggled to the resistance against the Nazi occupation. She spoke of her days playing semi-professional softball, on a team with "homosexual women" that she didn't yet understand. She reviewed her decision to enter nursing and the opportunities granted her by the military. She met her husband while stationed in Germany and married, not an altogether poor decision after all she outranked him. She served valiantly in Vietnam, received a Bronze Star for serving her country well. After returning home it was time to start her family, and her first son was born in 1968. Three more children followed, yet the colonel was not happy. Soon followed divorce and the haunting taunts of her children and ex-husband calling "dyke," "faggot," "queer," she related tearfully.

After leaving Seattle, the colonel found solace in returning to the military, continuing her education, obtaining her doctorate in nursing, and finally in the meeting of her partner Diane. All went well until she sought top secret security clearance to attain the rank of general, and happened to mention to the investigator that she was a lesbian. The rest of the story is history, the colonel's separation form the military, the trial, the following appeals and suits culminating in the colonel's being reinstated into the National Guard.

The colonel now stands as an example to us all, a beacon of hope.

"So many people live in silence because they happen to be gay," she said. "We must break the stereotypes, be free people with equal rights, living all as Americans in America."

She continued, "We must take away the stigma, put a face to who we really are, you know, take a straight couple home for dinner." The crowd laughed. "We must empower one and other, reach out to those who don't know, who don't understand. When you invade privacy, where do you draw the line? Sexual orientation is something that is mine, it's personal. No one has to approve. It's not for you to judge. I claim my right to my individuality."

The evening ended with a question-and-answer period followed by a book signing, all in all an outstanding event. The evening was a tribute to the pioneer efforts of Renae Bennett, who worked tirelessly to arrange this special event. The evening was also made possible through the kindness of many organizations including Northampton Community College student organizations, the NCC Division of Arts and Sciences, NCC Foundation, NCC Project Aware and Act 101; AT&T League; Diamonz; Lehigh Valley Gay and Lesbian Task Force; Lafayette College's Friends of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals; Lehigh Valley Pride; Moravian College's Gay, Lesbian and Bi Group; PFLAG; the Stonewall; Village Bake Shop, and individual contributions.

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SILENCE

(Continued from p. 1)

religious and political right undermine any sense of security we might have felt in the wake of Clinton's inauguration. Many of us were naive enough to believe marching on Washington would substitute for the hard work it takes to make changes in society. We can read about the victories won by the right everyday:

■ a rise in physical violence against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered individuals;

■ measures introduced in a growing number of states to eliminate protection of lesbians and gay men;

■ domestic partnership efforts stalled or reversed in a number of cities;

■ school districts denied funding for including positive representation of alternate families; and

■ religious leaders hailing homosexuals as the greatest threat to life in the free world since the fall of Rome.

This is, and will continue to be, the price we pay for our silence.

Three years ago we began to organize what we hoped would be a Valley-wide organization to educate the community about issues concerning gays and lesbians. We admit that we were not even sure what that meant, nor did we know where that would take us - but we said we were willing to put our names and our faces in the view of the public if, by so doing, we could begin to change some of the widespread misperceptions about who we were. Three years later we are wondering how much things have changed right here in the Lehigh Valley because of our efforts. Those of you who take the time to read the newsletter each time it arrives in the mail know that we have lost board members over the course of the past two years. Some of you have seen those changes as an opportunity to get involved yourselves. Some have responded to the call for help with particular fundraisers or activities; we appreciate every bit of help we can get. But we stand here tonight to tell you that it's not enough - not enough to make the changes we need to make - not even enough to ensure that protection for which we have fought will not be taken away.

We need to learn from those who are hell-bent on eliminating us and step back, regroup and prioritize. Newt Gingrich and his ultraright cronies have not bothered to worry about ideological differences among them - they have organized against a common foe. Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell worry less about the religious background of their supporters as they cash checks contributed to them by people from all walks of life than they do about how many people they convince to stand with them. They know that they can not afford to quibble over philosophic differences that will not matter if they achieve their goals and are meaningless if they do not.

The gay and lesbian community has not been able effectively to organize against the powers that would eliminate us because we cannot seem to get beyond our own petty differences. And unless we do, we will witness many of our brothers and sisters forced back into the closet by a society convinced that we are not like them.

So tonight is about starting over - regrouping - presenting ourselves to one another. We have invited other gay and lesbian organizations here tonight to talk about what they are doing and to inform us all of the wonderful diversity our community has to offer. But we would be remiss were we not to admit that often - despite the talents and hard work of many in our community - we do not support one another. All too often we view membership in one organization as contradicting membership in another. We sometimes worry more about where an event is happening, than what the event is designed to do. We elicit each other's help, but are slow to volunteer to help one another. And we have not learned, despite countless attempts, the necessary art of networking.

If we had there would not be lectures by gay artists, journalists and performers so poorly attended as to be an embarrassment. There would not be more than seven college and university groups struggling singularly on their respective campuses to introduce issues important to the gay and lesbian community. We would not hear of leaders of organizations calling for their membership not to support the Task Force. And it would not be so difficult for us to speak to one another.

We have asked you here this evening to vote for new board members. Each of the individuals who has decided to run for a position on the board is doing so because he or she believes what we are doing is important enough to devote time and energy to. Those of you who have made being here this evening a priority are doing your part as well. But we need to hear from you beyond tonight. We need you to take this time to fill out the survey tonight; to volunteer to help get the survey to other individuals in the community; to support the benefit that will be held at Diamonz on June 22, and one which is in the planning stages at the Stonewall. We need you to keep your members current, rejoin when it expires and talk to others about the importance of supporting organization like the Task Force dedicated to making your lives better.

We invite you to share your ideas with us - understanding that we will do the best that we can with the resources we have. We invite you to attend monthly board meetings, but hope that you would be sensitive to the limitations of an all-volunteer board.

In a few short days we will celebrate Pride Week with a series of wonderful opportunities to feel good about ourselves. As occurred last year, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders will enjoy opportunities to pray together, play together, to view our films and hear our music. It promises to be a wonderful week, and it will happen for all of us because a few people have worked for months to make it happen. When Col. Cammermeyer spoke in the Valley in April, many of us felt validated, and countless straight friends and colleagues learned something about the discrimination we face. But it only happened because a few people worked tirelessly to make it happen.

JOIN US...

... in making the Lehigh Valley a better and safer place to live. You can help by becoming a member of the Task Force.

Name

Street address

City, State, ZIP

Municipality *(City, borough, township)*

Telephone

$15 ☐ Basic membership
Benefits: mailing list, referral database, volunteer opportunities, lesbian and gay community information, newsletter, a vote in meetings.

$10 ☐ Student or senior member
Benefits: Same as above. However, students under 18 do not vote.

$25 ☐ Family membership
Benefits: Same as basic member. This category is for domestic partners and their children living in the same household. Each person gets 1 vote, for a maximum of 2 votes per family. Children under 18 do not vote.

$30 ☐ Organizational member
Benefits: newsletter, referral database, free listing in newsletter. No vote.

☐ Contributor
Help the Task Force pay for mailings and other start-up expenses. Your donations would be very much appreciated.

I'd like to get involved in a Task Force committee:

- ☐ Communications
- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Fundraising
- ☐ Membership
- ☐ Nominations
- ☐ Systems and Structure
- ☐ Youth Issues

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Legal expert discusses gays and the law

By **ANN R. CARTER**

Ruthann Robson, a faculty member at the City University of New York law School and author of Lesbian (OutLaw: Survival under the Rule of Law (1992), addressed issues relating to sexuality and the law in a public lecture delivered at Lafayette College on Tuesday, April 4.

In her talk, "Sexuality and Other Legal Problems," Robson examined some of the complexities and inconsistencies in the way in which sexuality, in particular lesbian and gay sex, is treated by the American legal system. This treatment is complicated by the absence of general agreement about what sex is.

Definitions that are derived from an individual's personal experience or from traditional moral and ethical norms can differ significantly, Robson noted, from the way in which sex is viewed in the context of criminal and civil law. She discussed two cases -- each involving consenting adults of the same sex -- in which criminal convictions were obtained in very imprecise terms: the well-known case in which Michael Hardwick was convicted of violating Georgia's sodomy statute and a 1968 case in which a woman was sentenced to prison for engaging in sexual activities with another woman at a Michigan campground.

Robson's Lafayette lecture was based on a course on sexuality and the law which she teaches at CUNY. She also offers courses on constitutional law, family law and feminist legal theory and is the author of two short story collections, Eye of a Hurricane (1989) and Cecile (1991).

Her appearance at Lafayette was sponsored by the Friends of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexual (FLAG-B); the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues; and the American Studies, Government and Law, and Women's Studies programs.

Art exhibit June 18

"With and Without Hats," an exhibit of broken-chain color design art paintings, poetry and jewelry by Iolsta Hatt, is scheduled for 4-6 p.m. Sunday, June 18, at the Stonewall's Moose Lounge in Allentown. A wine and cheese reception will be held. For information, call (610) 432-0706 or (717) 754-7744.

Get the word out!

Do you want to reach the Lehigh Valley gay community with your product or service? An advertisement in The Voice of the Valley is the way to go.

The Task Force newsletter is distributed to members and patrons of gay-friendly establishments in Lehigh and Northampton counties. Total circulation is 1,000.

Advertising rates

Full page	$150
Half page	$75
Quarter page	$50
Business card	$25

Advertising deadlines

August edition	July 15
October issue	September 15

To place an ad, call 691-7653.

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